

Week Ending Friday, October 9, 1998

**Statement on the Death of
Gene Autry**

October 2, 1998

Hillary and I are saddened to learn of the death of Gene Autry. An entire generation of Americans has lost a beloved old friend from childhood. Gene Autry's music and movies captured all that was good and inspiring about America's Old West. His characters taught children across America important lessons about courage and freedom, justice and fairplay. And in leaving behind a treasure trove of recordings—from "Back in the Saddle Again" to "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer," America's First Singing Cowboy will sing forever. Our thoughts and prayers go out to the Autry family.

NOTE: This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

**Remarks at a Democratic National
Committee Reception in
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**

October 2, 1998

Thank you. Thank you very much for the warm welcome. *[Laughter]* I've had a wonderful time in Philadelphia today, and I am deeply indebted to you for being here tonight, for supporting our party, our candidates, and what we stand for.

I, too, want to thank Congressman Chaka Fattah for the High Hopes program. He and the mayor met me today at the airport with a number of young children from Philadelphia who are in your school system, in your middle school system. And then later, we sat down and drank a soft drink together, and I visited with them. And Chaka asked how many of them wanted to go to college, and they all wanted to go. And now they and literally tens of thousands of children like them all across our country are going to be able to go because of the initiative that he brought

to me, that I embraced, and that we have worked so hard to pass: the High Hopes scholarship program. And we thank him. America is in your debt, Congressman. Thank you.

And I believe we have one of our candidates for Congress here, too, tonight—Roy Afflerbach. Let's give him a hand. He's somewhere. Where are you, Roy? There you go. *[Applause]* Thank you. Thank you for running.

I want to thank Steve Grossman for doing a superb job as the chairman of the Democratic Party. And we will not tell his mayor that he bragged on Rendell shamelessly tonight. *[Laughter]* I also want to thank Len Barrack of Philadelphia for being our finance chair. He's doing a wonderful, wonderful, wonderful job.

And finally, let me say that the mayor was uncommonly generous tonight, but his administration is basically the embodiment of my philosophy of government. When we came before the American people, Al Gore and I, in 1992, we said we had a different idea, that we wanted everyone in America who was a responsible citizen to have opportunity. We wanted to come together as one community across all of our differences of race, religion, politics, income. We wanted to prove that you could be pro-business and pro-labor. We wanted to prove that you could be in favor of economic growth and still improve the environment. We wanted to end all these sort of false choices that had been imposed on us by the hot rhetoric of Washington for too many years. And we had a different theory of government, that we thought that the main role of government was to create the conditions and to give people the tools to make the most of their own lives.

And all the initiatives that the mayor mentioned, that he so generously gave me credit for, most all of them were available to a lot of other places, too. But Philadelphia made the most of its opportunities because in no

small measure of the gifts, the dedication, and the downright aggression of its mayor. And I cannot tell you how much I admire him for that.

You know, I'm sure all of you have had an experience like this in your life in some context or another—by the time somebody calls you 15 times and asks you for something, you say, yes, just to stop them, you know. [Laughter] When Ed Rendell gets all over you like a wet blanket about something—[laughter]—you know you might as well just cry “uncle” and go on to something else. I say that because the achievements of this city have been truly phenomenal.

And I have always loved coming here. You know, the people of Philadelphia have been quite wonderful to me and Hillary and to Al and Tipper, voting for us in record numbers and by record margins in both elections and I'm very, very grateful.

Let me just take a few minutes to be a little serious with you tonight. I was so moved today by all the things that were said to me on the street—didn't even mind the protestors. That's the American way. But you like it even more when they're not in the majority—[laughter]—and that seemed to be the case today. But I want you to know that, on behalf of the First Lady and on my part, I'm very grateful for those personal expressions.

But I do not believe that adversity is the enemy of the Democratic Party in this election. Indeed, adversity can be our friend, because it's not only good for personal reformation; it's good for people to sort of dig down deep inside and ask yourself what's really important and what's really fair. What do you really care about? What will you act for? What will you move for?

The real enemy the Democrats have in this election is complacency—because we are doing pretty well as a country. We've got the lowest unemployment rate in 28 years and the lowest percentage of people on welfare in 29 years and the first balanced budget and surplus in 29 years, and it's the biggest in history. We've got the best wage growth in way over 20 years. We've got, as Steve Grossman said, the biggest drop in Hispanic poverty in 30 years and the lowest unemployment rates and poverty rates among African-

Americans since statistics have been kept, the highest homeownership in history. All that is very good. I'm grateful for that.

But the real question is, what will we do with this moment? Our friends in the other party know that in spite of your presence and generosity here tonight, they always have tons more money than we do. I'll tell you a little more about that in a minute. [Laughter] But they also know that oftentimes at these midterm elections, the people who always vote in presidential elections, a lot of them don't vote in midterm elections. And they tend to be our voters. Why? Well, they're young parents on modest incomes; they have to worry about how to juggle child care and work, and voting on a work day is another hassle. A lot of them live in cities and don't own cars and have transportation problems. And how are they going to get to work and to the polling place? And that extra effort is hard to make.

I tell you, my friends, our enemy is complacency. It is not adversity. Adversity is forcing us to focus on what is important and what we believe in and what we're prepared to fight for. And while I think it's a wonderful thing that all these good things are happening in our country, you know there are still some people in Philadelphia who have not felt the benefits of the things that have been done, and you know there's more to do.

I want you to know that a long way away from here, in the high plains of America, people that work hard to feed you on the farm don't know there's been a recovery because they have to export a lot of their products, and they've been flooded out or burned out or had diseases. They've had all kinds of problems. And now the Asian markets, where they sell their food, are closed to them because the folks don't have any money over there. We could lose 10,000 family farmers in America this year, at a time of greatest prosperity for the country as a whole in a generation.

So we have challenges at home. And I've always believed that when times are good, the worst thing you can do is kick back and relax. You have to see that as an obligation to look at the real challenges facing the country and take them on. That's what we've tried to do.

So we, the Democrats, have gone before the American people and we said, "Look, we have a program for this election, and we think it's worth your voting for. We know that the other side has tried to offer you—for most of you—a modest tax cut. Right here, before the election, they want to spend the surplus. And we've given you a harder message." We've said, "Look, we've waited for this for 29 years. We worked for it for 6 years. Shouldn't we let the red ink turn to black and let's let it dry for a day or two before we squander it?"

At a time when there's so much financial turmoil throughout the world, shouldn't we set a good example to stabilize the global economy? And even more important, knowing as we all do—every person in this room knows that while Social Security is absolutely stable for the people who are now on it and the people who are about to go on it, when all the baby boomers get in it is not sustainable under the present circumstances, because there will only be two people working for every one person drawing Social Security.

Everybody in this room between the ages of 52 and 34 is a baby boomer. And everybody I know at least my age—and I'm the oldest of the baby boomers—we're all profoundly worried that if we don't do something about this now, when with modest changes now we can have huge impacts down the road, that the time will come when we'll retire and our country will be confronted with two terrible choices. Either we'll have to put a whopping tax increase on our kids to maintain the system as it is, undermining their ability to raise our grandchildren, which none of us want to do; or, we'll have to take a whopping cut in Social Security benefits, which today keeps one-half of the senior citizens in America out of poverty.

So I say, tempting though it is before an election to shovel up a little tax cut, let's show a little restraint and a little knowledge of the last 29 years and say, "No, no, we're going to save Social Security first before we spend it." I believe that's an issue worth voting on. And, believe me, the elections will send a message to the Congress about which path you wish to take.

There is a second issue I think is important. I talked about it all day today, and I

never thought I'd come to Philadelphia or go anyplace in America in a political election and say, "The big issue is, are we going to fund the IMF?" Most Americans don't know what the IMF is. Sounds like those people that make bowling equipment. [Laughter] The International Monetary Fund is a fund to which we and others contribute that helps countries that are poorer and developing, who have good policies, to try to grow their economy. Or when they get in trouble, it tries to help them work out of trouble without just being absolutely destroyed.

For 8 months I've been trying to get America to make its fair share of contribution. Why? Because we can't lead the world—and you know the troubles that Asia has; you know the troubles in Russia; you see the impact, how it echoes in Latin America, our fastest growing market for American products. You see people say when the stock market changes here that that has something to do with this financial trouble overseas.

We have an obligation not only to others throughout the world but to our own economy. Thirty percent of this growth we've enjoyed has come from selling things to people overseas who had enough money to buy them. And when they get in trouble, eventually we will suffer from that. And already, I've told you, our farmers are.

And so I say to you, if you want to keep the American economic recovery going, if you like the way it's gone the last 6 years, and you'd like to have a few more years of it, then America has to lead the world away from the brink of the worst financial crisis in decades. And that means we have to pay our fair share to the fund that will do it. And I think that's something worth voting for.

The third issue worth voting for is education. For 8 months I have had before the Congress an education program. We have succeeded in getting bipartisan agreement in the balanced budget for tax credits for all students to go to college, for the deductibility of interest on student loans, for more Pell grants. Our Democrats put that before the Republicans, and we were able to get bipartisan agreement—and now for Congressman Fattah's High Hopes program. That's great.

But you all know that we don't yet have a world-class elementary and secondary education system that will guarantee to every child, without regard to race or neighborhood or income, a chance to be able to take advantage of those college opportunities. And until we do, America will never be everything it ought to be.

And so I came before the Congress and I said, "Okay, we've listened to the educators. I, personally, and Hillary and I have been going into the schools for 20 years now listing and watching and learning, and here's our program. It's pretty straightforward." Number one, in the balanced budget, paid for, put up enough money for school districts across America to hire 100,000 teachers to take average class size down to 18 in the early grades. It will make a difference.

Number two, provide—provide a tax incentive that will help to build or repair 5,000 school buildings. I went to Jupiter, Florida, and saw a dozen house trailers outside a school because the population is growing so fast. The mayor took me to a school building in Philadelphia that was over 65 years old. It was one of the most beautiful buildings I've ever seen, but it wasn't in good shape because there's not enough money to repair all those buildings. And all over America in the cities, I see people say, "Oh, our children are the most important things in the world to us." What does it say to them if they walk up the steps every day to a school where the windows are broken or a whole floor is closed down? Very often, people can't even look out the window in some of these places, because they can't afford to heat and cool them, so they just board them up. Five thousand school buildings—that's the second thing it does.

The third thing it does is to give funds to cities for after-school and summer school programs to help kids who are in trouble. I don't believe kids should be promoted endlessly if they don't learn what they're supposed to learn. But I don't think the children should be branded failures because the system fails them. So give them those after-school programs and the summer school programs and the mentors they need to learn what they need to learn. That's a part of our program as well.

The fourth thing it does is provide funds to hook every classroom in the country up to the Internet by the year 2000. Now, I think those are things that are worth voting for—I think they're worth voting for.

And finally, there's the Patients' Bill of Rights, the health care HMO bill of rights. Here's what it says: If you walk out of this room tonight and, God forbid, you get hit by a car, and you're covered by an HMO plan, a managed care plan, you ought to be able to go to the nearest emergency room, not one clear across town because that's the one that happens to be covered by your plan. It says if your doctor tells you that he or she can't help you and you need to see a specialist, you ought to be able to see one. It says if your employer changes HMO providers while you're going through a certain medical treatment, you ought to be able to finish with it.

Now, let me just tell you what that means. How would you feel if you were 7 months pregnant and somebody came to you and said, "I'm sorry, your employer changed providers; you've got to give up your obstetrician, and here's Dr. Jones"? How would you feel if someone in your family was undergoing chemotherapy—I've been through this, a lot of you have, and you know it's a pretty traumatic thing for families. I remember when my mother went through it—we sat around and tried to make jokes about whether she'd lose her hair and what kind of wig she'd buy. You get real nervous about whether your loved one is going to get so sick they can't eat. Now, this is serious; this happens. How would you feel if you were two-thirds of the way through a chemotherapy protocol and somebody said, "I'm sorry, you've got to change your doctor"? This is big stuff. And I think it's worth voting for—I think it's worth voting for.

The Congress—the House passed a bill that didn't guarantee any of those things and what little it did guarantee left out 100 million Americans. Then it went to the Senate, and our crowd had a right to bring our bill up in the Senate, and they couldn't keep it away. So you know what the leader of the Senate did? He shut the Senate down for 4 hours. I mean, turned out the lights. Everybody got under the desks. Why? Because

they didn't want to be recorded as voting against this, but they didn't want to make angry the insurance companies who oppose it. This is the symbol of the difference between the two parties today, make no mistake about it. And I think it's a big deal.

Now, what have they done with their year in the majority? Except for this higher education bill, I can't think of much. They killed the minimum wage. They killed campaign finance reform. They killed tobacco legislation reform that would have protected our children from the dangers of tobacco. They killed the Patients' Bill of Rights. They have continued their assault on the environment. They have gone backwards on paying for the International Monetary Fund; they've taken no action on it. And they've taken no action on the education bill, and they went backwards on saving Social Security first when the House passed their tax plan. It's over in the Senate now. There is this huge difference.

And what I want you to do—I thank you for coming here tonight. I thank you for these contributions. We need the money, and we'll spend it well. But you have to go out and tell people, there is this cynical idea that you won't vote and that good times makes you less likely to vote. And I know it's more trouble for a lot of people you know to vote. But if you believe that America ought to be about not what goes on in Washington, DC, but what goes on in the neighborhoods of Philadelphia, in Boston, and in rural North Dakota and in rural Nebraska—if that's what you believe—if you believe in saving Social Security first, if you believe in the Patients' Bill of Rights, if you believe in education as our top investment priority, if you believe in keeping our economic recovery going, then you should support our party—not just tonight but on election day.

And I want every one of you to go out every day between now and then and stir it up among your friends, and make sure that we surprise the cynics on election day.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:25 p.m. in Room 201 at Philadelphia City Hall. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Edward Rendell of Philadelphia; and Roy C. Afflerbach, candidate for Pennsylvania's 15th Congressional District. This item

was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner in Philadelphia

October 2, 1998

Thank you very much. I kind of hate to follow Rendell tonight. [*Laughter*] It's a true story, that story you heard about me asking if he modeled for these sculptures. [*Laughter*] You know, he did so well tonight, I think he sort of halfway talked himself into believing it. It was great. [*Laughter*]

I tell you, I would just like to say one serious thing about the mayor. I remember when we walked the street here in 1992, when he took me into a neighborhood where the gangs and the drugs had been cleared out. I remember when we shot baskets together. He won. [*Laughter*] I think I've demonstrated to the whole world that I'm not always very smart, but I was smart enough to know I shouldn't win that basketball game in '92. [*Laughter*] I knew the only score I was trying to win was in November and that it would help if I took a well-considered dive. [*Laughter*] No, he beat me fair and square, actually.

But I want you to know that to me it's just literally thrilling to come here to this city to see what has been done, to see the whole sort of spirit of the place, to see the neighborhoods that have come back, to see the people that are working, to see the projects that are on line.

And when I became President, I believed that we needed in Washington to find a way to reduce the deficit until we balanced the budget, to reduce the size of Government, to reduce the burden of regulation, to reduce the plethora of programs in a lot of these areas, but to be more active in creating the conditions and giving people the tools to solve their problems at the grassroots level.

And every tool that we put out there, Ed Rendell used as well or better as anyone in America. And it is an awesome thing to see. And I just want to thank him for proving through this city that this great country can solve its problems, meet its challenges, and work in a stunning fashion. I am very grateful